

Response to President Obama's State of the Union Address

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Tonight, President Obama talked about the deepening inequality.

But that is a testament of his own presidency. A presidency that has betrayed the hopes of tens of millions of people who voted for him out of a genuine desire for fundamental change away from corporate politics and war mongering.

Poverty is at record-high numbers - 95% of the gains in productivity during the so-called recovery have gone to the top 1%.

The president's focus on income inequality was an admission of the failure of his policies.

An admission forced by rallies, demonstrations, and strikes by fast food and low wage workers demanding a minimum wage of \$15. It has been forced by the outrage over the widening gulf between the super-rich and those of us working to create this wealth in society.

While the criminals on Wall Street are bailed out, courageous whistleblowers like Edward Snowden are hunted down and the unconstitutional acts he exposed are allowed to continue.

Obama is the president who is using smartphone apps - games like Angry Birds – to spy against tens of millions of ordinary people in a completely blatant violation of basic constitutional rights.

The President claims ending two wars while he continues to intensify a brutal campaign of drone wars in multiple countries, killing hundreds of innocent civilians, and not to mention the plight of US soldiers returning with permanent medical conditions and declining veterans' benefits.

Obama is the president whose broken website is a symbol of the broken hopes of millions who believed his promises for affordable healthcare.

"Climate change is a fact," says Obama.

Here is another fact: Climate change is getting worse and worse, on his watch. There has been a massive increase in incredibly destructive practices like the use of coal and fracking.

Leadership in stopping the disastrous Keystone XL pipeline has come not from Obama or Congress, but from the thousands of courageous people organizing and taking direct action to stop it.

Obama shouts "Fix our broken immigration system." He is the president with record numbers of deportations.

My brothers and sisters, these problems are not new. And they are not an accident.

Working people have faced nearly four decades of wage stagnation and rising income inequality.

Four decades, with four Republican presidents and three Democratic presidents. Four decades that show neither party can solve these problems and that both fundamentally represent the same interests – the interests of the super-wealthy and big corporations.

We will only make progress on the basis of fundamental, systemic change. We need a break from the policies of Wall Street and Corporate America. We need a break from capitalism. It has failed the 99%.

Both parties bow down before the free market, and loyally serve the interests of their corporate masters – the only difference being a matter of degree.

The political system is completely dysfunctional and broken. It is drowning in corporate cash.

Working people, youth, people of color, women, the elderly, the disabled, immigrants – the 99% – have no voice or representation

We need our own political party. Independent of big business, and independent of the parties of big business.

Some say it cannot be done.

But look at the example of my campaign for Seattle City Council. I ran as an open socialist. I did not take a penny in corporate cash. My campaign raised \$140,000 from ordinary working people. I ran as an independent working-class challenger to the capitalist establishment.

I ran on a platform of \$15 minimum wage, taxing the super-rich to pay for mass transit and education, and for affordable housing, including rent control.

I am only taking the average worker's wage while politicians in Seattle and in Congress are totally out of touch with the lives of the rest of us.

We built a grassroots campaign of over 450 people. With almost 100,000 votes, my election was the first time in decades an independent socialist was elected in a major US city.

Americans are hungry for something different. And it's not just in Seattle. A recent poll showed that sixty percent of Americans want a third party.

Let's talk about minimum wage. Obama said, "No one working full-time should have to raise a family in poverty."

And his solution? Raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 over 3 years.

I absolutely welcome any step forward on raising the minimum wage. And it is outrageous how the Republican Party is standing in the way.

But let's be honest: \$10.10/hour over three years – or \$20,000 per year if you are lucky enough to have a full-time job – is not a ticket out of poverty for working families.

Fast food workers and Walmart workers have gone on strike and built powerful protests in cities in every part of the country over the past year for \$15/hour. And that is the only reason politicians are now talking about raising the minimum wage.

Look at the example of the SeaTac \$15/hour initiative. A initiative for \$15/hour minimum wage was on the ballot – and won!

“Let's make this a year of action,” Obama said.

In my view, we need action by working people and the poor for higher wages and a \$15/hour minimum wage. Action by young people fighting student fees and the debt around their neck for the rest of their life. Action by homeowners against the epidemic of foreclosures. By trade unionists against anti-trade union laws and for workers' rights.

Get organized!

Get active in your union. Get active in a local movement. Join the struggle to defend the environment.

Join with me and my organization, Socialist Alternative, to challenge big business and fight capitalism.

The epicenter of the fight back in 2014 is the Fight for Fifteen. I urge you to be part of this struggle. Find out more and sign up to get involved at 15Now.org.

Solidarity!